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Linguistic Anthropology of Education

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Abstract
Linguistic anthropologists investigate how language use both presupposes and creates social relations in cultural context (Agha, 2006; Duranti, 1997; Silverstein, 1985). Theories and methods from linguistic anthropology have been productively applied to educational research for the past four decades. This chapter describes key aspects of a linguistic anthropological approach and reviews research in which these have been used to study educational phenomena. Readers should also consult the chapter by Betsy Rymes on Language Socialization and Linguistic Anthropology, in Volume 8 of the *Encyclopedia*, for a review of linguistic anthropological research in the language socialization tradition.

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LINGUISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY OF EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Linguistic anthropologists investigate how language use both presupposes and creates social relations in cultural context (Agha, 2006; Duranti, 1997; Silverstein, 1985). Theories and methods from linguistic anthropology have been productively applied to educational research for the past four decades. This chapter describes key aspects of a linguistic anthropological approach and reviews research in which these have been used to study educational phenomena. Readers should also consult the chapter by Betsy Rymes on Language Socialization and Linguistic Anthropology, in Volume 8 of the *Encyclopedia*, for a review of linguistic anthropological research in the language socialization tradition.

Almost all education is mediated by language use. The linguistic and paralinguistic signs that compose educational language use have both referential and relational meanings. When educators and learners speak and write, they signal things not only about the subject matter they are learning but also about their affiliations with social groups both inside and outside the speech event. These affiliations, some of which are created in educational events and institutions, can shape students' life trajectories and influence how they learn subject matter. For both theoretical and practical reasons, then, educational researchers need to understand how language use both creates and presupposes social relations during educational activity.

Linguistic anthropology provides a useful set of tools for studying how educational language use creates social relations (Wortham and Rymes, 2003). As implied by its name, linguistic anthropology is an interdisciplinary field—a recognized subdiscipline within American anthropology that also draws on linguistics (e.g., Eckert, 2000), qualitative sociology (e.g., Goffman, 1981; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard and Lintz, 1996), cultural anthropology (e.g., Street, 2005) and European "linguistic ethnography" (e.g., Blommaert, 1999; Rampton, 2005). Linguistic anthropologists study how signs come to have referential and relational meaning as they are used in social and cultural contexts. In doing so they draw on four key concepts, comprising what Silverstein (1985) has called the "total linguistic fact"—that is, four aspects of language use that must be analyzed to understand how linguistic signs have meaning in practice—*form, use, ideology* and *domain*.

M. Martin-Jones, A. M. de Mejia and N. H. Hornberger (eds), Encyclopedia of Language and Education, 2nd Edition, Volume 3: Discourse and Education, 1–11.

Linguistic anthropologists use linguists' accounts of phonological, grammatical, and other systematically distributed categories of language form. Unlike formal linguists, however, linguistic anthropologists are not primarily interested in how forms have meaning apart from contexts of use. Instead, they study how linguistic signs come to have both referential and relational meaning in social and cultural context (Duranti, 1997; Hymes, 1964). The meaning of any linguistic sign in *use* cannot be determined by decontextualized rules, whether linguistic or social. No matter how robust the relevant regularities, speakers and hearers can use signs in unexpected yet meaningful ways (Goffman, 1981; Silverstein, 1992). Linguistic anthropologists study how speech comes to have sometimes-unexpected meanings in local contexts. As important as local context is, however, the meaning of any linguistic sign cannot be understood without also attending to more widely circulating models of the social world. Linguistic anthropologists often construe these models as *ideologies* of language—models of linguistic features and the speakers who characteristically use them, which people use to understand the social relations signaled through language use (Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity, 1998; Silverstein, 1985). These ideologies are not evenly distributed across social space, but have a *domain*—the set of people who recognize the indexical link between a type of sign and the relevant ideology (Agha, 2006). Linguistic anthropologists study how models of language and social relations move from event to event, across time and across social space, and how such movement contributes to local and historical change.

FORM AND USE

The earliest linguistic anthropologists of education moved away from a linguistic emphasis on referential meaning to a more ethnographic emphasis on appropriate communication in cultural context (Gumperz, 1982; Hymes, 1964). They described how students from nonmainstream language communities employed norms of appropriate communication from their home communities and how mainstream educators often misinterpreted their language use as uneducated (Cazden, John, and Hymes, 1972). This research attended systematically to linguistic *form*, but it did so to understand how linguistic patterns interconnect with other aspects of communicative events—with nonverbal signs, the layout of a setting, physical objects, presupposed models of social relationships and appropriate demeanor, and the emergent organization of the speech event. Contemporary linguistic anthropology of education continues to offer systematic analyses of various linguistic patterns, ranging from studies of phonological variation across groups (e.g., Bucholtz, 2001; Eckert, 2000; Stocker, 2003) to studies of

grammatical and lexical patterns that distinguish dialects and registers (e.g., Jaffe, 1999; Kiesling, 2001).

From the beginning, linguistic anthropology of education has also emphasized the study of language in *use*. Hymes (1972) argues that speech can have multiple functions and that educational researchers must examine how utterances come to serve particular functions in context. Instead of presenting speakers as following decontextualized linguistic and pragmatic rules, Gumperz (1982) and Hymes (1972) describe speakers as drawing on diverse resources and creating novel responses in context. Erickson and Schultz (1982) provide an extended study of creative language use, in which they explore the "socially and culturally organized improvisation" that occurs in conversations between academic counselors and students from nonmainstream backgrounds. Erickson and Shultz do not argue simply that nonmainstream students and mainstream counselors experience a "mismatch" of discursive styles, resulting in counselors' misjudgments about students. They show how counselors and students use various resources to create, override, resist, and defuse such mismatches. Nonmainstream students are often disadvantaged by their nonstandard habits of speaking and by mainstream counselors' assumptions about these "deficits," but such disadvantage does not happen simply through a clash of monolithic styles. Erickson and Shultz find that "situationally emergent identity" explains more about the outcome of a "gatekeeping" encounter than demographically fixed identity, and they urge attention to how speakers use social and cultural resources in context both to reproduce and to overcome disadvantage.

The general point here, as described systematically by Silverstein (1992), is that signs indicate social relations only in context. When a speaker uses a less formal term, for instance—say, "lawyer" or "ambulance-chaser" instead of "attorney"—this can indicate that the speaker is poorly educated or unrefined, but it can also signal solidarity or humor. Tokens of such a sign only come to have determinate social meaning when hearers understand them against the background of relevant context. "Context," however, potentially includes an enormous number of sometimes contradictory pieces of information. When I said "ambulance-chaser" just now, were you aware of the fact that I had recently been victimized by an unscrupulous lawyer, or the fact that I am organizing a grass roots movement to rescue our government from the legal-lobbyist complex, or the fact that I know you are married to one? Any or all of these aspects of the context could have been made salient by earlier interaction, or they could be established things that we know about each other. Depending on which features of the context are in fact salient at the moment of utterance, participants will interpret the sign differently. This is what Silverstein calls "contextualization,"

the fact that signs come to have meaning only as they and co-occurring signs index aspects of the context. Cultural knowledge is crucial to interpreting the relational meaning of utterances, but we can only interpret that meaning by examining how utterances get contextualized in use—not simply by establishing a list of decontextualized beliefs, styles, or rules that allegedly suffice to determine meaning.

Contemporary work in the linguistic anthropology of education has shown how attention to language in use illuminates educational processes. Rampton (2005), for instance, describes language "crossing" in urban, multiethnic groups of adolescents. Crossing is the use of words or other linguistic features from one or more other languages in the course of an utterance. Rampton studies the use of Panjabi, Carribean Creole, and Stylized Asian English by white, South Asian and Carribean youth in the UK. He does not argue simply that minority languages are devalued and used to stigmatize nonmainstream youth, nor that such youth use their home languages to resist such discrimination. Both of these processes, among others, do occur, but Rampton studies how various social effects are achieved in practice. Crossing is a "discursive strategy" in which diverse youth contest and create relations around race, ethnicity and youth culture. The use of terms from a minority language does not have one or two fixed meanings—like stigma or resistance—because particular uses involve contestation, teasing, resistance, irony, and other stances with respect to the larger social issues surrounding minority identities in Britain. Like Erickson and Shultz (1982), Rampton is deeply concerned about how the cultural politics of difference can disadvantage minority youth, and he describes the larger social and political forces regimenting language, identity, and politics in the UK. But, he does not reduce disadvantage to predictable forms of identity politics, in which certain signs of identity routinely signal negative stereotypes. He shows instead how youth use language to navigate among the conflicting forms of solidarity and identity available to them in multiethnic Britain.

He (2003) and Rymes (2001) also attend closely to creativity and indeterminacy in speech events. Like Rampton, they also describe habitual patterns of language use as well. He (2003) shows how Chinese heritage language teachers often use predictable three-part "moralized directives" to control disruptive behavior. Rymes (2001) describes typical "dropping out" and "dropping in" autobiographical stories, through which academically marginal students construct senses of self and reject or embrace formal education. But, He and Rymes do not describe speakers as passively invoking these habitual patterns. Such familiar patterns are resources that educators and learners use and sometimes transform as they construct particular stances in context. He shows how the Chinese heritage language teacher's authority waxes and wanes during a lesson,

as she uses moralized directives in various ways and as students variously react to these uses. Rymes shows how youth in an "alternative" school for "at-risk" students reproduce, contest, ridicule, and otherwise reposition typical dropping out and dropping in stories. Sometimes they even contest the distinction between students who have embraced and rejected school, thereby positioning themselves in unpredictable ways with respect to linguistic, ethnic, and economic stereotypes. This work shows that creative uses of language take shape only against a background of habitual patterns. In order to study the social relations established through education, we must attend to the sometimes-unexpected ways that both marginalized and mainstream speakers use habitual patterns to position and reposition themselves with respect to larger identities.

POWER AND IDEOLOGY

Erickson and Shultz (1982), He (2003), Rampton (2005), and Rymes (2001) all attend both to the unpredictable character of local interactions and to the larger social patterns that provide resources for such interactions. Other linguistic anthropologists of education attend less to the creative potential of language in use, focusing instead on the power relations bound up with language and education. Before moving on to the concept of language *ideology*, I will review several studies that show how linguistic anthropologists have attended to questions of *power* at the same time as they acknowledge the importance of creative language use.

Heller (1999) and Blommaert (1999) both describe language planning and education within multilingual nation states. They acknowledge the unexpected meanings that can emerge in particular events, but they do not focus on creativity within discursive interactions. Instead, they provide more detailed accounts of how state and institutional language policies can differentially position diverse populations. Heller studies how French Canadians' arguments for ethnic and linguistic legitimacy have shifted over the past few decades. Before globalization, French Canadians proclaimed the authenticity of their culture and asserted their rights as a minority group in Canada. In recent years, however, they emphasize the benefit of French as an international language spoken in a multicultural and multilingual Canada. This shift in models of "Frenchness" has changed the value of various French Canadians. Now bilinguals are valued more than monolinguals and Standard French is valued more than vernaculars. Heller explores how this shift plays out in a French language high school in Anglophone Ontario, exploring how the school handles the tensions between standard and vernacular French and between French and English. Blommaert

(1999) describes how the Tanzanian state has used language planning for nation building. He traces the attempt to make a common nation out of a multilingual society by establishing Swahili as the index of a homogeneous Tanzania and as the primary language of education. In the process, language planners sometimes deliberately and sometimes inadvertently create "symbolic hierarchies" between languages and language varieties. Blommaert shows how institutions like schools (and the media, science, etc.) organize language use and language hierarchies, so as to make some types of speakers sound more authoritative.

Other linguistic anthropological work on language and power has addressed literacy. Street (2005) distinguishes between an "autonomous" model of literacy—which casts literacy as a cognitive skill independent of cultural contexts—and models that emphasize the diverse cultural activities in which writing is used. He shows how governments and institutions like school favor the autonomous model and how this model disadvantages "less literate" people and students with nonmainstream literacy practices. The contributors to Street (2005) describe how schools might instead use diverse home literacy practices as educational resources. Collins and Blot (2003) follow Street in exploring literacy practices, but they also describe how local practices are embedded in global processes (like colonialism and neoliberalism) and institutionally anchored power relations. They analyze interdependencies between local uses of literacy and larger sociohistorical movements, describing, for instance, the hegemony of the literate standard and how this has provided cultural capital to some groups and disadvantaged others. They argue against the common assumption that schooled literacy always provides intellectual and economic salvation for less literate peoples, showing instead how this assumption devalues nonstandard literacies and has been used to justify exploitation.

Like Collins and Blot, Eckert (2000) argues for a "practice" theory approach to language and power. Using arguments similar to those offered by Rampton (2005), Silverstein (1992) and others who work on language in use, Eckert denies that tokens of a given linguistic form have determinate social meanings. Furthermore, she argues that apparently stable and homogeneous macrosocial categories are more variable than most theories of "power" assume—"masculinity," "heterosexuality," "sluttiness," and other social categories are constructed in practice instead of being stable and earlier to instances of language use. Eckert does not abandon macrosociological variables, but she explores how they are deployed in unexpected ways. Using ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods, she describes the relations among and the divergent phonological patterns of peer groups at a suburban high school. Her study reveals complex relations among

students' social positions and their habitual phonology, with important patterns organized by gender, social class, and orientation toward mainstream institutions like school.

As linguistic anthropologists have moved toward practice-based accounts that attend both to language in use and to power relations, many have used the concept of language *ideology* (Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity, 1998). Silverstein (1985, 1992) defines an ideology as a "metapragmatic" model of language and social relations that regiments particular uses. Because of indeterminacy about what a sign might mean in context, speakers and hearers must draw on models that link types of linguistic forms with the types of speakers who stereotypically use them. When one such model becomes salient, from among the many that might be relevant to explaining the meaning of a given utterance, it "regiments" the values of indexical signs in the utterance and the context. When I called lawyers "ambulance-chasers," for instance—and you were unsure whether I was upset about a recent legal experience, crusading to overhaul the legal-lobbyist system, or insulting you and your spouse—you needed to know more about the relevant context to know what my utterance meant. Each of these models (aggrieved victim of legal misconduct seeking sympathy, political crusader seeking a convert, aggressive interlocutor) might frame the event we were engaged in, and in doing so stabilize the indexical value of "ambulance-chaser" (and neighboring signs) in a certain way. As Silverstein (1992) argues, any account of the social meanings of language use must describe such models and explain how they become salient in practice.

Many linguistic anthropologists have noted that such models or language ideologies often systematically associate types of speech with socially located types of speakers, across a range of events. This has become an important concept, allowing linguistic anthropologists to explore relations between the emergent meaning of signs in use, socially circulating ideologies and broader social structures. Language ideology has also been important for the linguistic anthropology of education, because schools are important sites for learning (and legitimating) associations between types of speakers ("educated," "authoritative," "at-risk," etc.) and types of ("refined," "educated," "intelligent," etc.) language use.

Jaffe (1999) uses the concept of language ideology to trace the policies and practices involved in the recent revitalization of Corsican. She describes the essentialist ideology that values French as the language of logic and civilization, the countervailing ideology that values Corsican as the language of nationalism and pride, as well as a less essentialist ideology that embraces multiple languages and multiple identities. Her analyses show how schools are a central site for the struggle among these ideologies—with some trying to maintain the centrality of French in the curriculum, some favoring Corsican language revitalization and

the displacement of French, and others wanting some Corsican in the schools but resisting a new "standard" Corsican as the official language of schooling. Jaffe explores both predictable sociohistorical patterns, like the struggle of a colonized people to value their own language in diglossic situations, and contradictions—like celebrations of "authentic" Corsican by "natives" who cannot speak the language well.

Bucholtz (2001) and Kiesling (2001) use the concept of language ideology to explore peer relations and ethnic stereotypes among white Americans. In her work with high school students, Bucholtz shows how many white adolescents adopt "deracialized" aspects of Black English Vernacular and thereby mark themselves as "cool." She describes how "nerds" reject coolness and mark this rejection by refusing to adopt any features of BEV. Nerds even go so far as to use what Bucholtz calls "superstandard" English, which includes careful attention to articulation, grammar, and lexis (saying "have to" instead of "hafta," for instance). The relevant ideologies here associate types of language use—superstandard, borrowing a few features of BEV, speaking mostly BEV—with types of people—nerds who reject coolness, white students trying to be cool, and white students who go too far toward a racialized other. Kiesling studies the speech of middle class, white fraternity brothers, exploring how racially linked features of their speech both serve local interactional functions and reproduce larger social hierarchies. He describes fraternity brothers asserting their intellectual or economic superiority over each other by marking interlocutors as metaphorically "black." On the other hand, he shows how they assert physical prowess over each other by themselves speaking like black men, thus inhabiting a stereotype of physical masculinity. The fraternity brothers use and reinforce ideologies of BEV speakers as less rational, economically distressed, and physically imposing, as they jockey among themselves for position in everyday interactions.

Stocker (2003), Bokhorst-Heng (1999), and Berkley (2001) apply the concept of language ideology to educational situations outside Europe and North America. Stocker describes a monolingual Spanish-speaking group in Costa Rica that is believed to speak a stigmatized dialect—despite the fact that their language is not linguistically distinguishable from their neighbors'—because they live on an artificially bounded "reservation" and are perceived as "indigenous." She shows how high school language instruction reinforces this ideology. Bokhorst-Heng describes how Singapore used schools to make Mandarin the "mother tongue" of ethnically Chinese Singaporeans. In 1957, less than 0.1% of ethnically Chinese Singaporeans spoke Mandarin as their home dialect, but in the 1970s the government selected Malay, Tamil, and Mandarin as the "mother tongues" of all

Singaporeans. The government created an image of Singapore, as a multicultural state composed of three homogeneous subgroups, and tied this image to the three standard "home" languages that students were to learn in school. Berkely describes Mayan speakers going to school to learn how to write "authentic" local stories in their language. He shows how this brought two ideologies into conflict—a literate ideology that valued the authority of the (young, female) teacher and treated literacy as an "autonomous" skill, and a local ideology that presented older men as empowered to tell stories on behalf of others. Berkley shows how the teacher and the elders creatively navigated this conflict, with older men telling stories that younger people learned to write down.

DOMAIN

Work on language ideology shows how language in use both shapes and is shaped by larger power relations. We must follow some of these authors and be careful, however, not to cast this as a simple two-part model—sometimes called the "micro–macro dialectic"—in which events create structures and structures are created in events (cf. Wortham, 2006). In fact, there are many scales of social organization relevant to understanding language in use. In their study of "untracking" as an educational reform, Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, and Lintz (1996), for instance, move beyond a simple combination of local events and larger social patterns. They explore various realms that influence "at-risk" students' school success—ranging from the student him or herself, to parents, family, the classroom, the school, peer groups, the community, as well as national educational policy and broader socioeconomic constraints. Instead of describing "micro" and "macro," Mehan and his colleagues describe how resources from many different spatial and temporal scales facilitate or impede students' academic success. They give a more complex account of how "intelligence," "educational success," and other properties are constructed in practice, describing how resources from various layers of social context come together to facilitate a given student's path.

One important type of resource for the linguistic construction of social relations, mentioned earlier are "metapragmatic" or "metasemiotic" models that associate linguistic features with a socially located type of speaker (Agha, 2006; Silverstein, 1992). (Agha 2006; Agha and Wortham, 2005) argues that all such models have a *domain*. Models that link linguistic features with types of social identity are used and recognized by only a subset of any linguistic community, and this subset changes as the model moves across space and time. There is no one "macro" set of models or ideologies, universal to a group. Instead, there

are models that circulate densely in communities ranging from pairs, to local groups, to groups at various spatial and temporal scales all the way up to global language communities. In analyzing language and social relations, then, we need to do more than relate micro to macro. We must instead describe various relevant resources—like models drawn from different spatial and temporal scales—that facilitate a phenomenon of interest, and we must describe the "intertextual" links across events through which models move (Agha and Wortham, 2005; Wortham, 2006).

Wortham (2006) applies this approach to the emergence of social identities in one ninth grade classroom in an urban American school. He traces the development of local models that specify different types of "student" one might be in this classroom, showing the distinctive gendered models that emerge across several months. These local models both draw on and transform more widely circulating models, and they are used in sometimes-unexpected ways in particular classroom events. The analysis follows two students across the academic year, showing how their identities emerge as speakers transform widely circulating models of race and gender into local models of appropriate and inappropriate studenthood, and as they contest these identities in particular interactions. Rogers (2003) also follows an individual student's trajectory across two years, as the student and her family negotiate with authorities about whether she is "disabled." Rogers shows how both institutionalized and local models and practices facilitate the transformation of this student from "low achieving" to "disabled," and she follows the intertextual links among official texts, conferences, tests, family conversations, and other events that helped constitute this student's trajectory.

Linguistic anthropologists of education study language form, in use, as organized by ideologies, as those ideologies move across social space and come to identify individuals. Educational research done from this perspective shows the utility of these concepts for illuminating important aspects of educational processes and institutions.

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